CYNTHIA ANN PARKER THE WHITE SQUAW

Fall of Parker's Fort in 1836. Van Dorn's Victory in 1858. Recovery of the White Squaw. Quannah Parker, Chief of All the Comanche Tribes : : :

By J. MARVIN NICHOLS

SEVENTY long years have gone by since Cynthia Ann Parker was lost to civilization. In the days when Fort Parker was destroyed this great empire State of Texas had a population of only 30,000. They were harassed by over 5,000 hostile redskins, chief of whom were the Caddoes and Comanches. Over 8,000 semi-civilized Indians roamed over the prairies, the most friendly being the Choctaws and Chickasaws. Most of our frontier history is rapidly passing away as the pioneers, one by one, cross the great divide. Like the lost mines of the adventurous Spaniards, vast historical wealth is irretrievably lost for the want of some one to put to record the rich reminiscences of the Texas heroes. It was lately my fortune to know and talk with one of the Rangers that captured Quanah Parker. From him I got the story of the white squaw and her boy—chieftain of all the Comanches.

In the fall of 1833, the Parker family moved from Cole County, Illinois, to Texas. The elder Parker was a Virginian by birth. He lived for a while in Georgia, but reared his family principally in old Bedford County, Tennessee. It was from this county, in 1818, that he moved to Illinois—then a country far west. To speak of Texas, even in the thirties, was but to mention a land toward the setting sun. It had a far, far away sound. But the elder Parker and his sons dreamed of the distant lands on the frontier. And they came to build their altar fires in a howling wilderness. And what is more strange, they came to be massacred by the Comanches, whose savage braves were destined to be ruled over by the blood of the very family they sought to wipe out in that terrible raid.

Those pioneers built Parker's Fort on the headwaters of the Navasota and about sixty miles above the settlements. It was a blockhouse, built about a mile west of the river and about two and one-half miles northwest of the present site of Groesbeck. The fort was established in 1834. At the time the Indians made their deadly raid—May 19, 1836—the following were in the fort: The Parkers, Plummers, Nixons, Kelloggs, Frosts, Dwights and the Faulkenburgs; Mrs. Duty, Silas Bates and Abram Anglin—representing twenty-two adults and some fifteen or more children. They were all in the fort on the night of the 18th—the night before the raid.

It was 9 o'clock, on the morning of May 19, 1836—that tragic day, like so many others that have made Texas a soil redeemed by her martyrs' blood. What would our mighty history be were it not for these bloody chapters that tell of the fall of forts and recount the heroism on such fields as Goliad and San Jacinto? To tell the story of these battles and our Alamo around our firesides is to teach our sons that they're born of Spartan blood.

James W. Parker, Nixon, the two Faulkenburgs, Bates and Anglin were off to the fields some distance in Navasota bottom. Suddenly, as if rising from the very dust, hundreds of Indians were seen riding toward the fort. They came within three hundred yards and, having halted, raised a white flag. Benjamin Parker went out to treat with them. He came back and said that he believed the Indians intended to fight, but that he would treat with them again. He went—but he never returned. Pandemonium set in. Amidst savage screeches and blood-curdling war whoops, the whole band charged the fort, now defended only by two men. Execution was speedy and horrible. It was the common story of an Indian massacre. From this sad rehearsal let us turn away to follow the fortunes of those few who lived to be even led into captivity. For there was a mother who was compelled to lift her nine-year-old daughter, Cynthia Ann, and her little boy, John, up behind a warrior. The Indian turned his pony's head to the far-away Comanche land. As he faded from view Cynthia Ann was torn from her mother's arms only some day to rock on her bosom a baby born to rule the warriors that stole his mother in the years of long ago.

Mrs. Kellogg was taken captive and fell into the hands of the Keechis. Six months after some Delawares bought her from these Indians for $150. They carried her to Nacogdoches, where General Sam Houston paid them a ransom of $150—all they paid and all they asked. One of the most revolting crimes at the fall of the fort was the murder of the elder Parker. Having surrounded him with his own family, they stripped, tomahawked and scalped him before their sight. On the way to Nacogdoches one of Mrs. Kellogg's rescuers slightly disabled a skulking Indian. She instantly recognized him as the slayer of the elder Parker. Without charge, judge or jury, the redskin was given quick passage to his happy hunting grounds.

William Donohoo, a big-hearted American merchant in Santa Fe, New Mexico, aided by some traders on the old Santa Fe trail, redeemed Mrs. Rachel Plummer from an unspeakably brutal captivity. These traders found her in the wild fastnesses of the Rocky Mountains, so far north of Santa Fe that it took seventeen days to reach that frontier town. After a year and six months of captivity she was given a royal reception. In a short time, Mr. Donohoo and his good wife carried her to her brother-in-law, a Mr. Nixon of Independence, Mo. In 1858, Mr. Nixon took Mrs. Plummer to her father's house. Twenty-one months of captivity had worn away. During all this while she did not know the fate of her baby from whom she was separated, and the child born six months after her capture was cruelly murdered in her presence. There is a remarkable thing about Mrs. Plummer's history. She was born the 19th, married the 19th, captured the 19th, ransomed the 19th, reached Independence the 19th, and died the 19th. Her baby, lost in the fall of Fort Parker, was ransomed and carried to Fort Gibson late in 1842. His grandfather reached home with him February, 1843. He grew to be one of the most respected citizens in Anderson County. This leaves Cynthia Ann and John Parker, who were held in captivity by different tribes—the girl by the Comanches, the boy probably by the Kiowas.

John Parker reached manhood and became a noted warrior. His tribe planned a campaign beyond the Rio Grande. On that raid John Captured a beautiful dark-eyed senorita and made her his wife. While yet a captive, she fell madly in love as only the Spanish maiden can. John became desperately ill with smallpox. The whole cowardly tribe fled in consternation, leaving him to die alone—and took his senorita. But this Spanish girl was haunted by visions of her suffering warrior-lover. Not counting danger and distance, she escaped and fled to his side. He got well—and, in perfect disgust, quit his tribe to make his home forever with the people of his faithful captive-wife. In all the romance of our early history there is no page so beautiful as this. It's the story of love's conquest over the heart of an American pioneer schooled in the savage discipline of the Kiowas and Comanches—the Arabs of the New World.

At the fall of Fort Parker the morning of May 19, 1836, Mrs. Parker was forced to lift her little nine-year-old girl, Cynthia Ann, up behind a heartless savage. He rode away to the hunting grounds of the wild Comanches. Twenty-four long years and seven months rolled by until she was recaptured December 18, 1860. In other words, Cynthia Ann was thirty-four years old when seen again. No word was had from her in this awful lapse of a quarter of a century. Long, long before her recovery she had been given up as one dead. But we must know some events that strangely brought about the purely accidental discovery of Cynthia Ann by which she was once more restored to a civilization from which she was long since weaned.

It was now 1858. Major Earl Van Dorn, with some United States dragoons, was preparing to leave Fort Belknap. The famous Van Dorn campaign against all the hostile tribes was just opening.

Sul Ross, afterward a household name in Texas, was only eighteen and on his college vacation. He took command of 135 friendly Indians—Wacoes, Tehuacanoes, Toncahuas and Caddoes. Van Dorn readily accepted their services when tendered and they entered on the famous campaign. Ross and his command took the lead; Van Dorn, with his dragoons and supply trains, brought up the rear. When Ross reached the Witchita Mountains he sent a trusty Waco and a Tehuacano to scout the Wichita village, seventy-five miles east of the Washita river. He hoped to find the camp of savage Comanches whose raid worked such awful havoc on old Fort Parker. The scouts were amazed to find that Buffalo Hump and his band of Comanches were in the village trading and gambling with the Wichitas. When night fell they stole two Comanche ponies and hurriedly carried word to Sul Ross. Buffalo Hump was the one chief among all the hostile tribes against whom Van Dorn's campaign was directed. Ross had a hard time to make him trust the word of his scouts. At last, he persuaded Van Dorn to make a forced march with his dragoons against the village.

The sun was just rising on the first day of October. Van Dorn, with his dragoons, and Sul Ross, with his 135 redskins, struck the Wichita village like thunderbolts out of a clear sky. Buffalo Hump and his powerful band were almost wiped off the face of the earth in the first assault. Van Dorn's command fought like demons, for they saw afresh the scenes of old Fort Parker. Many prisoners were taken. Among them was "Lizzie." She was a white girl for whom no relative was every found, nor a solitary soul that could give the faintest recognition. Sul Ross adopted, educated and reared her with all the tenderness of a father. She reached a graceful womanhood, married and died among the flowers and sweet perfumes of California. The next great epoch in frontier history was the battle of Pease river, where, after the dragging years of a quarter of a century had gone by, Cynthia Ann Parker lifts her form above the horizon of a civilization from which she had long since faded away.

When the leaves began to fall in 1860, a powerful band of Comanches made a terrible raid through Parker and adjacent counties. Under the leadership of Chief Nocona they spread ruin and disaster along the war trail. Sul Ross, now a captain of the Texas Rangers, with a force of forty Rangers, twenty dragoons from the regular army, and seventy citizens out of Palo Pinto County, took the Indians by complete surprise at their camp near some cedar mountains on the headwaters of Pease river. They were packing horses preparatory to breaking up camp when Sul Ross and his command swept down upon them like a whirlwind. In less than a half-hour he had killed or captured everything in sight except Nocona who, with an Indian behind him, broke for the mountains, six miles away. On a swift pony, the chief's squaw, with a baby in her arms, rode beside him. Ross and Killiher pursued them like devils. Ross soon came within range and killed the Indian riding behind Nocona. It proved to be a woman, hidden by a great buffalo robe. In her fall she unhorsed her chief by a death-grip. A deadly combat was drawn between Sul Ross and the Comanche chieftain. At last, a shot from his revolver broke the arm of the Indian so that he could no longer pull the bow string. The Ranger then shot him through the body. Walking deliberately to a tree he leaned against it and began his death chant, the only privilege a savage ever begs of his foe. Rangers having arrived, Nocona was commanded to surrender. He answered by a vicious thrust with his lance. A rifle ball brought the death song to an abrupt close. And Nocona's lance, shield, quiver and war bonnet were hung among many trophies in the State capitol.

The squaw and the child captured by Lieutenant Killiher proved to be Nocona's. The trained frontiersmen at once discovered that she was a white woman bronzed by the suns and winds of the plains, that her eyes were blue, and that she was weeping. They told her not to cry for they would not hurt her. For twenty-five long years an unbroken search had been made for the missing girl of old Fort Parker. Somehow, it dawned upon them that they had found the white squaw in the fallen chieftain's wife. The Indian neither weeps nor laughs. He is stolidly indifferent to any emotion that stirs the white man's breast. But she said she was crying not for herself, but for her two boys, as she thought, slain in the battle. She was carried to the setlements and readily identified as the long lost Cynthia Parker. A quarter of a century in the wigwams of the Comanches had made her as perfect an Indian as though she had been born around their camp fires. She had forgotten every English word. Civilization was so unbearable to her that she sought every chance for escape. A close watch had to be kept over her for days and days. Slowly the recognition of childhood scenes stole in upon her savage sense. At last she became contented in her brother's house in Anderson County. Her litle "Prairie Flower"—the baby that rode with its mother alongside Nocona's fatal flight—died. In less than two years Cynthia Ann Parker was tenderly laid beneath the flowers that bloomed on the grave of her litle barbarian.

(Continued on Page Thirteen.)